



Illustration by Ezra Gilmore.

Dear Ito

The look in your eyes,
the confusion in your smile,
the tears on my face when you can't
say my name—
memories are gone.
A one-way street of smiles
that only I can recall.
“Who are you?”
“It's me, Grandpa.”
You laugh,
stumbling over a fantasy tale from
your childhood.
I realize
you no longer remember being part of mine.
The pictures
are now a constant reminder
of who you were—
now you are a living ghost
of the man we all looked up to.
How do I tell a stranger
that he has been one of the biggest parts
of my life?

The sound of your heartbeat
as I hug you goodbye
is the only familiar feeling.
The backward cycle of fading,
after years of strong ties.
As you sit beside me,
I remember the times you protected me
from monsters in the dark.
I hope that one day you'll look up
and say my name.
I'm becoming a doctor,
just as I once dreamed.
Though you don't remember
the inspiring figure you were,
I thank you for the years you gave me.

Love,
the stranger beside you.

—Karolina Pellot Ortiz, MD